



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-6502

April 21, 2020

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren
Chairperson
Committee on House Administration
1309 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable James P. McGovern
Chairman
Committee on Rules
H-312, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairperson Lofgren and Chairman McGovern:

As our nation continues to confront the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, the American public must have confidence that their Members of Congress continue to perform the people's business. I know that both of your committees have been working hard to identify secure ways to begin allowing remote voting and remote committee work, including mark-ups, hearings, and essential oversight. Beyond implementing the proxy voting as a first step, we ought to use this time as an opportunity to prepare for Congress to be able to work according to its full capabilities even with social and physical distancing guidelines in place.

As you know, I have already indicated my clear preference for voting by the use of video-conferencing technology that millions of Americans now use to conduct business. These systems allow one to see and identify the person who is speaking and hear what is being said with little doubt about the identity of the participant. Used for the purposes of Floor and committee business, there would be little doubt who voted aye or nay. As, invariably, such action is performed in public and is public record, the issue of security appears to be minimal. While any distance-voting is less optimal than in-person voting or debating in committee or on the Floor of the House, the sound and image of the Member doing so virtually is far superior to the utilization of proxies.

In addition, we must put in place procedures to allow committees to do their work in full, including markup and hearings. We must update our rules explicitly to allow remote committee proceedings or change the rules to define "present" in a way that allows for Members participation through an approved video-conferencing platform. We might also consider amending the rules to delegate authority for establishing virtual practices for committees to the Committee on House Administration in order to ensure that there is a single clearing-house for best practices and developing new strategies.

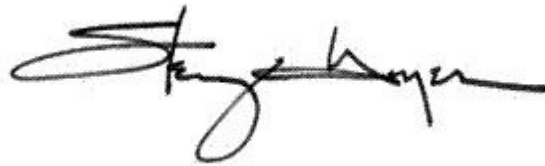
While there are many challenges, I believe we can overcome those challenges consistent with public transparency and our responsibility to get work done in a timely and effective fashion. Our goal remains reopening the Capitol complex safely, but even after the Capitol has

reopened and Members have returned, there will likely still be a need to make accommodations for the Floor and in committees for some time to maintain the necessary social distancing. By having a clear plan in place for how committees can safely conduct hearings and markups virtually, it will be easier to schedule Floor action in a way that protects the safety of Members and staff when we are able to vote in person in the Capitol.

The House must show the American people that we continue to work hard on their behalf – because we already are. Members participate daily in tele-conferences with one another, in virtual meetings with constituents and district leaders, and in video and phone discussions on how best to help state and local officials fight the coronavirus while shaping additional legislation to help workers in our economy. Enabling the House to work remotely, when necessitated by an emergency situation as determined by the Speaker in consultation with the Minority Leader, will make it clear to those we serve that their representatives are doing their part in this crisis. It will also ensure that the House can conduct its oversight of the Administration's relief efforts properly and fully.

Thank you for considering these recommendations, and I look forward to continuing to work with you on making sure the House can do its job as safely, effectively, and transparently as possible.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steny Hoyer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a long, sweeping underline.

STENY H. HOYER
House Majority Leader